

## Bioregions and Food Cultures of Italy

FDST-3000 (3 credits)

### Italy: Food Cultures and Sustainability

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

#### Course Description

Food cultures in Italy are extremely varied and complex. This course uses a different approach to the study of local food systems following the holistic concepts of bioregion and terroir. Regional food identities encompass landscapes, natural processes, and human elements as equal parts of a whole. The course has an emphasis on place-based learning and experiences related to food; students will visit various locations and complete hands-on activities, including workshops and dedicated tours. They will experience food not only as a discipline but also from a sensory standpoint. In fact, students' knowledge formation during the course will be used to guide their key sensory drivers of taste perceptions and consumption during food taste experiences.

After an introduction to food studies, slow food culture, and bioregionalism, we will study the features of our home base, Bologna, and its bioregion (plains and Po valley) including a field trip to Parma and Reggio area. We will then cover the history of Italian food and the Mediterranean dietary pattern. After that, we will learn about the bioregion of the Venice lagoon, while touring examples of island farming and urban gardening. We will also study the management of fishery, including the most recent blue crab invasion. Lastly, we will shift our focus to the city of Turin, in the Piedmont region, to experience local food practices focusing on urban agriculture, urban markets, and food access, while visiting Porta Palazzo Market, the largest open air market in Europe.

#### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze the relationships between food cultures, geographical regions, and sustainable practices in Italian bioregions, applying the concepts of bioregion and terroir.
- Compare and contrast traditional and modern approaches to food production and consumption in Italy, including the impact of the slow food movement and Mediterranean dietary patterns.
- Evaluate challenges and opportunities in urban agriculture and food access in Italian cities, using examples from field studies.
- Demonstrate knowledge of change and continuity in food systems and food culture and identify connections between practical experience and intellectual inquiry

- Demonstrate skills in sensory evaluation of food and articulate the connection between taste, place, and cultural identity.

### **Language of Instruction**

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of the field of food studies, agriculture, resource economics, and environmental science through in-country expert lecturers and field visits to a wide range of venues and regional locales.

### **Instructional Methods**

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

### **Required Texts**

A course pack including selections from the text will be provided on the course website.; The course website also contains numerous relevant texts and online resources and will be updated with required and optional readings throughout the program. All materials should be read before the class meets (classroom or fieldtrip) in order for you to fully participate. In addition to the assigned readings/homework, you will be often asked to bring into class your unique perspective from your major/minor in a written format (see below.) Food Studies is a quintessential multi-disciplinary field of study, and the variety of perspectives will not only vary and make conversations more stimulating but will also be extremely beneficial to the whole group as we address topics.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

Throughout the summer, classes will be held with two formats: lectures (for theoretical frameworks and preparation for class outings and field trips), and discussion-based classes in which students will reflect on the experiential components. There will be standard classes (classroom) as well as active-learning moments which will include several moving pieces – readings, conversations, meeting with guests, class outings and field trips, workshops, tastings, and so forth.

Evaluation will be based on your participation and performance across these diverse learning experiences. Highlighted below is the evaluation criteria for the course:

1. **Class Attendance and Participation (10%):** Attendance during the seminar is mandatory and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and during other activities and excursions. We encourage you to participate actively, but also remind you that speaking more is not always better. You'll receive participation credit for the days when you do the following:
  - **Be present** - the success of this interactive course depends heavily on you attending class. Being present in class helps you establish rapport with your instructor and members of the classroom community.
  - **Practice Active Listening** - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest, respect, an enthusiasm in responding to ideas (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, and taking notes.
  - **Be Involved in Class Discussions** - the only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
  - **Display Respect** – Practice ethical engagement and culturally responsive interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.
  
2. **Journal Entries (40%):** The purpose of these journal entries is to help bring your thoughts together coherently and you will be submitting your considerations regularly:
  - a) Journal Entry before class, in preparation for class, class outing, or guests (20%).
  - b) Journal Entry after class, class outing, tasting, or guests (20%).

All entries should range from 500 to 750 words, unless specified otherwise. Your writing should demonstrate understanding of topics discussed in class and covered in readings. Avoid merely summarizing readings, class discussions, or field trips. While entries can include factual information (what, who, when, where), they should also incorporate conceptual comments (why, how). The written reports at the end of each module, in particular, must include conceptual analysis.

As the course progresses, you'll be asked to make connections between course material and subjects related to your major or minor course of study. This approach encourages deeper engagement with the material and helps you apply course concepts to your broader academic interests.

Ideal entries will answer prompts thoughtfully, showcasing your ability to think critically about complex ideas and draw meaningful connections. The goal is to produce analytical responses that go beyond surface-level observations, demonstrating your active engagement with course material.

3. **Written Report at the end of a module/macro-topic (20%):** At the end of each module, you'll craft a report (approximately 1250-1500 words) that ties together the key concepts we've explored. Think of this as your chance to connect the dots between the theories we've discussed in class and the hands-on experiences you've had in the field. Your report should weave together academic insights with your personal observations.
4. **In-Class Article Analysis (10%):** There will be 3 in-depth article analyses conducted together in class, to investigate a problem or issue in great detail. These will be guided exercises (small groups) geared to understanding complex problems or complex systems presented in the reading.
5. **Final Project and Presentation (20%):** There will be a final project, which will include a brief presentation and an abstract to be submitted in a written format. For the final project, you will draw connections between a course topic and your personal and academic background, showcasing a quintessential example of a multi-disciplinary approach that is typical of food studies. Various formats for the final project can be considered, such as a media project, blog, digital storytelling, infographic, story map, or poster, etc.

#### Assessment

Attendance and participation	10%
Pre-Class Journal Entries	20%
Post-Class Journal Entries	20%
Written Reports	20%
In-Class Article Analysis	10%
Final Project	20%

The complete grading criteria/grading rubric is available on the class website. All assignments are designed to encourage active learning, critical thinking, and application of course concepts to Italian food cultures and sustainable food systems. Grades will be assigned on a scale of 1-100. Letter grades at the end of term will be assigned according to the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92.9), B+ (87-89.9), B (83-86.9), B- (80-82.9), C+ (77-79.9), C (73-76.9), C- (70-72.9), D+ (67-69.9), D (63-66.9), D- (60-62.9), F (59.9 and below).

#### Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

## Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

## Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

## **Program Expectations**

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

## **SIT Policies and Resources**

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all

published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

## Course Schedule

*\*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

### Module 1: Intro to Food Studies, Slow Food Culture, and Bioregionalism

This module introduces key concepts in food studies, slow food culture, and bioregionalism, with a focus on sustainable food systems and practices.

#### Sessions may include:

- Introduction to Food Studies and Research Methods
- Key Concepts in Food Studies
- Nature, Culture, and Food
- The Culinary Triangle
- Introduction to Slow Food Culture in Italy
- Bioregional Thought and Practice
- The Soil-Peace Nexus and Sustainable Agriculture

#### Required Readings:

- Miller, J., & Deutsch, J. (2009). Introduction, in *Food studies: an introduction to research methods*. Berg.
- Warren James Belasco. (2018). FOOD: The Key Concepts, Why Study Food? in *Food: the key concepts*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Montanari, M. (2006). Creating One's Own Food: Nature and Culture / Even Nature is Culture, in *Food Is Culture*, Columbia University Press
- Thayer, R. L. Jr. (2003). Bioregional Thought and Practice in *LifePlace*. Univ of California Press.
- Rattan LAL (2015) The soil–peace nexus: our common future, *Soil Science and Plant Nutrition*, 61:4, 566-578,

#### In-Class Article Analysis:

- Levi-Strauss, Claude. (1965/1966) The Culinary Triangle (translation by Peter Brooks of *Le Triangle culinaire*), *Partisan Review* 33, no. 4 (Fall 1966) 586-595. From *Food and Culture: A Reader, 2nd edition*, ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. Routledge, 2008, pp 36-43.

### **Recommended Reading:**

- Evanoff, R. (2017). Bioregionalism: A Brief Introduction and Overview, *The Aoyama Journal of International Politics, Economics and Communication*, No. 99

### **Field Component:**

- Bologna Food Markets Tour
- Bologna Serre Giardini Margherita Tour
- Bologna Bagni di Mario Tour

## **Module 2: The Bioregion around Bologna (the plains and the Po valley)**

This module examines the specific bioregion of Bologna and the Po valley, focusing on local food traditions, production methods, and their sustainability.

### **Sessions may include:**

- Bologna's Food History and Terroir
- Bologna City of Water: History of Bologna waterways
- Eno-gastronomic Tourism and Sustainable Practices
- Traditional Foods of the Region: Parmigiano Reggiano and Balsamic Vinegar
- Geographical Indications and Food Quality in the EU

### **Required Readings:**

- Gatta, Bitelli (2020) "A HGIS for the study of waterways: the case of Bologna as ancient city of waters". IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, Volume 949, International Conference Florence Heri-tech: the Future of Heritage Science and Technologies, 14-16 oct 2020, Online Edition.
- Hajdukiewicz, Agnieszka (2014) "European Union agri-food quality schemes for the protection and promotion of geographical indications and traditional specialities: an economic perspective" *Folia Horticulturae*, vol. 26, no. 1, Sciendo, pp. 3-17.
- Tregear, Arfini, et al. (2004). The impact of territorial product qualification processes, XI World Congress of Rural Sociology Trondheim, Norway.
- De Roest, K. and Menghi, A. (2000), Reconsidering 'Traditional' Food: The Case of Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40: 439-451
- Budak, Aykin, et al. (2014). Functional Properties of Vinegar, Vol.79, Nr.5, *Journal of Food Science*.

### **Recommended Reading:**

- Orioli, Valentina (2021) "Nature Prepares the Sites, but It Is Man Who Creates the Organism", in *Mapping Urban Spaces*, pp.106-117, Routledge.
- Giudici, et al. (2009). Traditional Balsamic Vinegar, *Vinegars of the World*, Springer-Verlag Italia, pp.157-158.
- Pomranz, M. (2022). Smart Cheese Rinds Help Fight Parmesan Fraud., *Food&Wine*

Magazine.

**Field Component:**

- Visit canals and hydraulic projects in the city of Bologna.
- Field Trip to Parma and Reggio Area, with guest lecturers.
- Tasting sessions of regional specialties on production sites.

### Module 3: History of Italian Food and The Mediterranean Dietary Pattern

This module explores the historical development of Italian cuisine and the principles of the Mediterranean diet, emphasizing their potential for promoting both health and environmental sustainability.

**Sessions may include:**

- Ancient Roman Cuisine
- History of Italian Food in the Medieval Age and in the Renaissance
- The Columbian Exchange and Its Impact on Global Food Systems
- The Mediterranean Diet: History, Health, and Sustainability

**Required Readings:**

- Giacosa, I. G. (1994). *A Taste of Ancient Rome*. University of Chicago Press (Selected pages.)
- Montanari, M. (2014). *A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age*. Bloomsbury Academic Publishing Plc. (Selected pages from the *Introduction*.)
- Albala, K. (2014). *A Cultural History of Food in the Renaissance*. Bloomsbury Academic Publishing Plc. (Selected pages from the *Introduction*.)
- Altomare R, et al. (2013) *The mediterranean diet: a history of health*. Iran Journal of Public Health.

**In-Class Article Analysis:**

- Nunn, N., & Qian, N. (2010). *The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas*. Journal of Economic Perspectives, Volume 24, Number 2, pp. 163–188.
- Bruno, M. (2019). Indigenous American Agricultural Contributions to Modern Global Food Systems. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science*.

**Recommended Reading:**

- McIver, K. (2015). *Cooking and eating in renaissance Italy: from kitchen to table*. Rowman & Littlefield (Selected Pages.)
- Barros, Vitor C., and Amélia M. Delgado (2022) *Mediterranean Diet, a Sustainable Cultural Asset* Encyclopedia 2, no. 2: 761-777.
- Kiani, Medori, et al. (2022) *Modern vision of the Mediterranean diet*. Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene (2 Suppl 3) pp. 36-43.

**Field Component:**

- In-Class Tastings



- Wine Tasting

#### Module 4: The Bioregion around Venice (the lagoon)

This module examines the unique food ecosystem of the Venetian lagoon and its challenges, with a focus on sustainable farming and ecological conservation.

##### Sessions may include:

- Venetian Lagoon Ecology and Food Production
- Island Farming and Fishery Management in the Lagoon of Venice
- Environmental Challenges: Blue Crab Invasion and Sea Level Rise
- Sustainability and Food Culture in Venice

##### Required Readings:

- Rossetto (2001) *The Management of Fishery in the Lagoon of Venice*. Proceedings of the Tenth Biennial Conference of the International Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade.
- Vianello (2017) *The Ransom of Mussels in The Lagoon of Venice: When the Louses Become "Black Gold"*. *International Review of Social Research* 2017; 7(1), pp. 22–30.
- Cappello (2023) *Sustainability as a Symbolic Resource at the Local Level, and Its Strategic Uses: A Study in Northern Italy*. *Ethnologia Europaea*. - ISSN 0425-4597. - 53:1(2023), pp. 1-21.
- Molinaroli E, Guerzoni S, Suman D. (2019) *Do the Adaptations of Venice and Miami to Sea Level Rise Offer Lessons for Other Vulnerable Coastal Cities?* *Environ Manage*, pp. 391-415.

##### Recommended Reading:

- Visentin, Francesco, and Francesco Vallerani (2018) *A Countryside to Sip: Venice Inland and the Prosecco's Uneasy Relationship with Wine Tourism and Rural Exploitation*. *Sustainability* 10, no. 7: 2195.
- Cavallo, Mastrovito. (2024). *Wine on water/Oil on water. Traditions and liquid modernity of viticulture and olive growing in the Lagoon of Venice*. Tokyo and Venice as Cities on Water. Past Memories and Future Perspectives. Editrice Cafoscarina. Venice.
- Rice, J. (2024). *Blue Crab Invasion Upends Italy's Culinary Traditions and Ecology*. *Washington Post*.

##### Field Component:

- Field Trip to Venice
- Visit a Venetian farming island, and taste its specialties
- Visit examples of urban gardening in Venice

#### Module 5: The Bioregion around Turin (the city meets the mountains)

This module focuses on urban food systems and the intersection of city and mountain

ecosystems in Turin, with an emphasis on sustainable urban agriculture and food access.

**Sessions may include:**

- Introduction to Urban Agriculture, Food Access, and Food Waste
- Urban Regeneration and Rooftop Gardens in Turin
- Turin's Food System and Metropolitan Food Policy
- Management of Unsold Food in Outdoor Markets
- Sustainable Fast Food in Italy

**Required Readings:**

- Alattar, M. (2021). *Eating inequity: The injustice that brings us our food*. Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 10 (3), 17–30.
- Peira, Giovanni, et al. (2018) *The Management of Unsold Food in Outdoor Market Areas: Food Operators' Behaviour and Attitudes*. Sustainability 10, no. 4: 1180
- Pettenati, Dansero, Toldo (2018) *The Turin Food System toward a Metropolitan Food Policy: An Actorial Perspective* in Re-imagining sustainable food planning, building resourcefulness: food movements, insurgent planning and heterodox economics, Coventry University.
- Saporito E. (2015) *Roof-top orchards as urban regeneration devices. OrtiAlti case study*, In: Localizing urban food strategies. Farming cities and performing rurality. 7th International Aesop Sustainable Food Planning Conference Proceedings, Torino, 7-9 October 2015, edited by Giuseppe Cinà and Egidio Dansero, Torino, Politecnico di Torino, pp 365-373.

**In-Class Article Analysis:**

- Blekking, Jordan, Cascade Tuholske, and Tom Evans (2017) *Adaptive Governance and Market Heterogeneity: An Institutional Analysis of an Urban Food System in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Sustainability 9, no. 12: 2191.

**Recommended reading:**

- Bonadonna, Alfiero, et al. (2019) *Eating Hamburgers Slowly and Sustainably: The Fast Food Market in North-West Italy*. Agriculture 9, no. 4: 77

**Field Component:**

- Field Trip to Turin
- Visit to Porta Palazzo Market
- Meet with local volunteers